



A Lesson for Everyone



collected and rewritten by Phillip Martin

"Have you heard the new?" chirped the parrot as she landed next to her friend on the rocks.

"What news do you mean?" asked the other bird.

"The Cloud People have seen the horrible drought down here on the earth," continued the parrot. "So, they have invited all of us to come for a feast since they lack for nothing."

"How very kind of them," twittered the other bird.

The birds were the only creatures that had actually seen the Cloud People, but all of the animals on land had heard of them. From deep in his home, down in a hole among the rocks, Tortoise heard the two birds talking about their

invitation. And, he had plans to attend the feast as well.

"That's all very good for you," snapped the tortoise, as he appeared at the entrance of his home. "But, what about the rest of us down here? Do you intend to let us starve?"

"Well, if you had wings, we'd be happy to guide you," chirped the parrot.

"Can't you take me with you?" pleaded the tortoise. "I'm just as hungry as you two."

"As my friend already told you, we'd take you if you could fly," the other bird replied. "But, you must realize you are too big for us to carry."

"But I'm starving!" cried the tortoise.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! There must be something we can do!" exclaimed the parrot.

"Perhaps the tortoise could fly if we attached some feathers to his feet."

"I'll try anything!" said the tortoise.

The two birds flew around the forest, gathering feathers from any bird willing to help. It didn't take long to complete the task. Tortoise looked so funny, and all of the birds had to laugh. But, the idea worked! The unlikely guest soared through the air with the birds as they flew off to meet the Cloud People.

"How are we going to explain him?" asked one of the birds.

"Let's say that he is the king of all birds," suggested the parrot.

"The Cloud People will certainly honor him if we say he is our king."

"I like the idea," smiled the tortoise.

"You may call me Everyone, since I am the king of every one of you. Yes, call me King Everyone."

As expected, the Cloud People were very honored to have the king of the birds as one of their guests. And, the feast that they prepared was certainly fit for a king. None of the birds could believe the large amounts of food that their hosts had prepared for them.

The king of the Cloud People welcomed his guests. "It is an honor to have everyone here today. It is our privilege to help you in your time of need. And

now, the food is ready. Everyone come and enjoy our feast."

Upon hearing his name, Tortoise stepped forward. He ate everyone's food. When the tortoise finished eating everything in sight, no one else had anything to eat. It went without saying that everyone was mad at Everyone!

The birds were so furious that they took back all of the feathers that they had so carefully attached to the tortoise's feet. Although he knew it was what he deserved, Tortoise still cried and begged for help. "Don't leave me this way! Without the feathers, how can I ever return home?"

The parrot was the last to find her feather. Just as she prepared to leave, Tortoise pleaded, "My little friend, have mercy on me. Since I cannot fly, I will have to jump. At least tell my wife to prepare a large pile of grass near our home so I can land safely. If I fall on the rocks, I might die."

However, the parrot was in no mood to help the tortoise. She was especially angry since it was her idea that helped Tortoise in the first place. So, the little bird flew off with a different message for Tortoise's wife. "Your husband requests you to prepare a large pile of rocks near your home," she chirped.

The tortoise's wife had no idea where her husband was or what he had done. And, she had no idea why her husband would request a pile of rocks when they already lived among lots of rocks. But, the wife did as she was asked and prepared a large pile.

From up in the clouds, Tortoise could see his wife had made a pile for him. He just didn't know the whole truth until he crashed. And, it was a terrible crash that shattered his once smooth shell into many pieces. Tortoise's wife lovingly nursed him back to health. However, his shell was forever scarred from the fall. From that day on, any time anyone saw Tortoise's shell, they were reminded that there was a lesson for everyone about selfishness.